

RUSSIA AND THE WEST IN IRAN

the Kuchik committee began a lucrative trade in rice with the British. These developments produced a definite split between the left and right wings of the committee and weakened the whole movement so much that by the summer of 1919 Jangali forces were dispersed by 20,000 fresh government troops. Kuchik and Ekhsanulla escaped to the woods of Gilan. Thus ended the first act of the rebellion.

The next few months were devoted to making contact with the Bolsheviks. Both Jangali leaders came to the conclusion that the revival and further success of the Gilan revolution would depend upon the degree of assistance from Soviet Russia. Following this line, Kuchik Khan went to Lankoran, a province of Russian Azerbaijan.

There he learned that Kolomyitsev, the unofficial Soviet representative in Teheran who had been obliged to flee from Iran, was trying on his own initiative to get in touch with the Jangalis. The two failed to meet, however, owing to the rout that the Bolsheviks suffered at the hands of the Mussavatists in the Mughan steppe. Eventually contact was established through secret emissaries. In the fall of 1919, at the time that the British decided to withdraw from the Caucasus and to retreat from Iran, Kuchik Khan rallied some of his dispersed forces and reorganized his committee.¹⁰ The winter of 1919-1930 witnessed a revival of the movement.

In the early spring of 1920 the Jangalis received a letter from a Bolshevik commander in the Caucasus informing them that the Bolsheviks would soon capture Baku. Evidently the Soviet forces were seeking closer liaison with Iranian rebels in anticipation of their invasion of Iran. The letter was followed by the dispatch of a

special emissary. "In the night of May 17," wrote Ekhsanulla, "a Russian comrade came to the forest and revealed that in a few days the Bolsheviks would come to Enzeli." This proved true. On the morning of May 18 the Red fleet appeared before Enzeli and opened fire on the British fortifications. Despite his earlier resolution to seek the support of the Bolsheviks, Kuchik Khan experienced at that fateful moment some doubts. On the day of the appearance of the Soviet fleet he spent a long time in meditation and prayer. (He had had, originally, an ecclesiastical rank in the Moslem hierarchy.) Ekhsa-

10 The members of this new committee were Kuchik Khan, Hasan Khan, Khalu-Qurban, Ghulam Ali-Baba, and Ekhsanulla Khan.